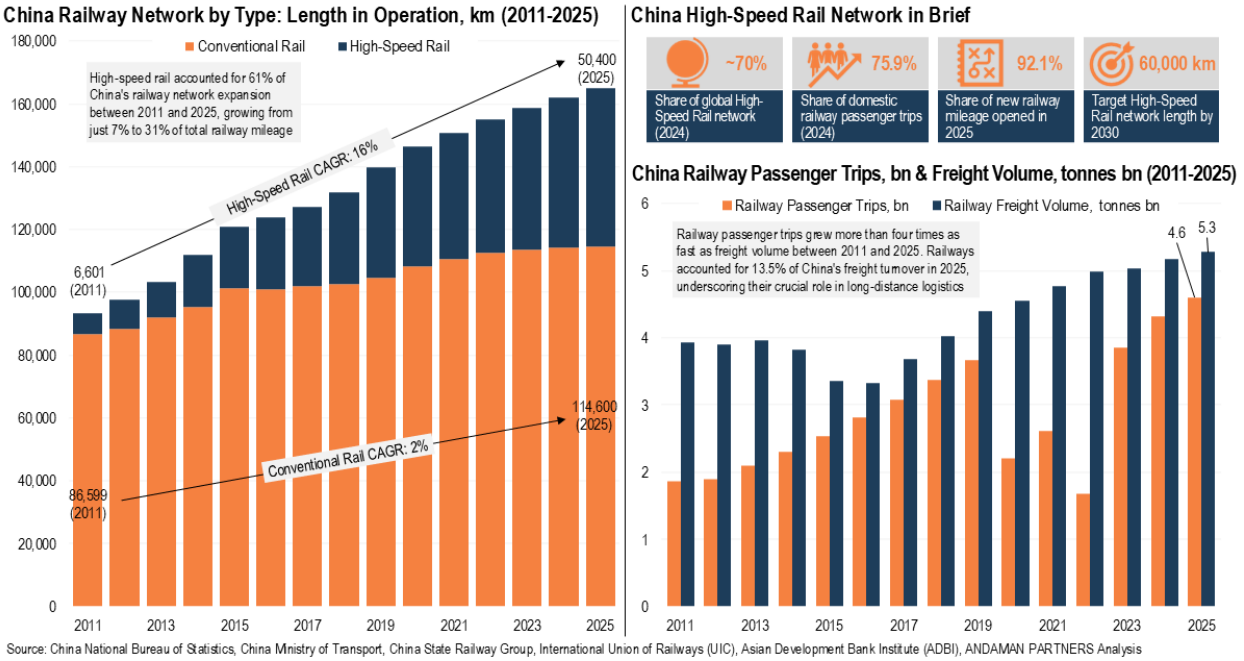
High-Speed Rail and the Transformation of China's Railway Network

High-Speed Rail now accounts for nearly a third of China's 165,000 km railway network as passenger and freight traffic reach record levels



Source: China National Bureau of Statistics, China Ministry of Transport, China State Railway Group, International Union of Railways (UIC), Asian Development Bank Institute (ADBI), ANDAMAN PARTNERS Analysis

In 2011, China had just 6,600 kilometres of high-speed railway lines. By 2025, that figure had surpassed 50,000 kilometres, accounting for nearly a third of the country's 165,000-kilometre railway network and approximately 70% of the world's high-speed rail infrastructure.

This expansion has fundamentally changed how people travel across China. High-speed trains accounted for more than three-quarters of domestic railway passenger trips in 2024, while total annual railway passenger trips reached a record 4.6 billion in 2025, up 147% since 2011. Faster connections between cities have made business travel, tourism and personal mobility easier across much of the country.

Yet conventional railways remain essential to China's economy. In 2025, the country's railway network transported a record 5.3 billion tonnes of goods, accounting for 13.5% of national freight turnover and playing a crucial role in connecting manufacturing centres, inland markets and ports.

With high-speed rail accounting for more than 90% of newly opened railway mileage in 2025 and China targeting a 60,000-kilometre HSR network by 2030, the transformation is far from complete. For businesses operating in China, this means increasingly connected regional markets, greater labour mobility and new opportunities arising from improved connectivity.

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